Paulownia Archery Bows

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PARTS:

- Wooden slats (3)
  I used Ikea's Lindmon blinds (product #10092570 at ikea.com/us), which come complete with precisely located holes good for making all kinds of stuff.
- Cord (1)
  Nylon clotheslines works great.
- Sticks (1)
  for the arrows. Bamboo garden stakes work well

SUMMARY

When we took possession of our humble London home, I was shocked to find that all the window treatments had been removed. So we suffered the rat-in-a-maze Ikea gantlet to get a good price on new Venetian blinds. I hung the new blinds immediately but it took me months to get around to tailoring them by removing the extra slats.

As soon as I did, I realized that I had a maker's trifecta win in my hands: easily worked hardwood, prefinished and free.

First I built a new box for our kitchen plastic wrap, then my daughter wanted some doll furniture. Next was a laminated beam to repair our baby stroller, and a few slats to serve as drawer dividers for the clothes dresser I'd built ages ago but never quite finished. But the

pièce de résistance was a set of archery bows that I whipped up to the delight of the neighborhood kids.

Wonder Wood

It turns out that Ikea's Lindmon blinds (product #10092570 at ikea.com/us) are made from Paulownia elongata, an incredibly fast-growing hardwood that originates in southern China and Southeast Asia but has been bred for cultivation around the world, including in the somewhat colder climate of the southeastern United States (see http://paulowniatrees.org).

Paulownia is made into everything from coffins to stringed instruments. The wood is fine-grained, virtually knot-free, and easily worked. It has the look and feel of balsa, only slightly heavier with about twice the strength and hardness.

I could tell the wood was something special, but claims that paulownia is an environmentally friendly "wonder tree" made me skeptical, so I did some homework. I checked out the scientific literature and even paid a visit to Tokyo, where the Tanaka furniture company maintains the World Paulownia Museum adjacent to its production facilities — visit them online at http://kiriyatanaka.co.jp (and for an always amusing English translation use Google Translate).

After researching, playing a paulownia guitar, and seeing evidence of the wood's fire resistance, I'm a believer.

The tree is sustainable, reduces soil erosion, and grows up to a very marketable 12 meters high in just seven years. After harvest, new trees grow from the stumps. Planted alongside food crops, it boosts yields by creating a windbreak and an improved microclimate. It serves as a biomass fuel and has been shown to grow nicely in swine lagoons, where it provides waste remediation. It has a very high ignition point and is relatively rot-resistant. And apparently it was named for a Russian princess.

Step 1 — Build the bow.

- Cut a length of line about 1' longer than your slats. Tie a stopper knot at one end, then stack your slats and thread the line through 1 set of holes. Bend into a curve, thread through the other set of holes, tie off, and you're done. Add duct tape to show the kids where to hold the bow. The quick construction is key, because as soon as the first kid gets one, the others will be all over you.
- For arrows, you can use any straight sticks; bamboo garden stakes work well. Cut a vee groove at one end to accept the bowstring. You would think that you'd need feathers to get the arrows to shoot well, but in fact the sticks fly nicely naked.
- If they flew any straighter they'd be deadly, which isn't really the point. Similarly, you could add more slats to your bow for more force, but try not to start an arms race.

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